



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## GOVERNOR NOEM PROCLAIMS VIETNAM VETERANS DAY

At the request of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, Governor Kristi Noem has proclaimed Monday, March 29, 2021, as “Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day,” calling on all South Dakotans to recognize the courage, service, and sacrifice of the men and women who served during the Vietnam War.

Some defended as ground troops in a combat capacity in country, some were a mile off shore in a Navy ship providing fire support, some were air support. Others provided the necessary support roles in Vietnam, at nearby posts, and back in the States that are vital during a foreign engagement. All who served were affected in some way by their experience.

“More than 27,000 South Dakotans served valiantly under difficult circumstances during the Vietnam War. 210 South Dakotans made the ultimate sacrifice,” said Governor Noem. “Through the establishment of an annual statewide Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day, South Dakotans can express their appreciation and honor the men and women who served during the Vietnam War by thanking them for their courage, devotion, and sacrifices.”

“Those who fought in Vietnam are part of us and part of our history,” said Greg Whitlock, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. “They performed with a steadfastness and valor that veterans of other wars salute, and they are forever in the ranks of that special number of Americans in every generation that the nation records as true patriots. Our Vietnam Veterans fought for freedom in a place where liberty was in danger.”

“On this special day, we encourage our fellow Americans to join us in remembering and honoring those who served during the Vietnam War with the gratitude and respect that they deserve,” said Whitlock.

Welcome home!

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# VA EXTENDS DEBT RELIEF

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is extending debt relief for veterans through September 30, 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The VA will suspend collection of all veteran benefit overpayments incurred between April 6, 2020, and September 30, 2021. No adverse actions or collection attempts will occur during this suspension period. Veteran medical care and prescription charges incurred from April 6, 2020, through September 30, 2021, will be cancelled and any payments for this time period will be re-funded.

The VA is committed to keeping veterans informed about their debt and the expansive relief options available. The VA may send subsequent letters providing details of the benefit debt and patient statements regarding medical care copayment debts. These letters and patient statements are for information only, unless veterans choose to act before the suspension period ends. No adverse action will occur at this time.

## **WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT**

With regards to benefit overpayments, veterans will receive a letter from the VA Debt Management Center (DMC) showing current debt amount as well as available options. Subsequent letters will be sent showing updates to veterans' accounts. The VA will resume mailing patient statements for medical care and prescriptions received prior to April 6, 2020, once all charges for medical care and prescriptions on and/or after April 6, 2020, are cancelled. However, no payments are required until at least October 2021.

## **WHAT VETERANS CAN DO NOW**

For benefit overpayments, no action is required through September 30, 2021. That said, if veterans would like to resolve debts sooner, there are options they can exercise now. The VA can work with veterans to determine what option is best. Options include: make a payment, dispute the debt, request a waiver, establish a payment plan or submit a compromise offer.

For benefit debt, information is available online (<https://www.va.gov/manage-va-debt/>), by calling the DMC (800-827-0648), or visiting the DMC website (<https://iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/ask/>).

Charges for medical care and prescriptions incurred from April 6, 2020, through September 30, 2021, will be cancelled. The VA will refund payments that veterans have already made.

For medical care copayment questions, please review the information found on the following website: [https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/revenue\\_ops/Financial\\_Hardship.asp#Relief](https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/revenue_ops/Financial_Hardship.asp#Relief) or call the Health Resource Center (866-400-1238).

## **WHOM TO CONTACT**

For questions about VA benefit debt, including information on how to make voluntary repayment arrangements or for information about how to request a waiver, how to dispute a debt, or how to submit a compromise offer; call the DMC (800-827-0648) from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. CT Monday through Friday. Visit <https://iris.custhelp.va.gov/app/ask/> to submit your request online.

For medical care copayment questions, please contact the Health Resource Center at (866-400-1238) from 7:00 a.m. to 7 p.m. CT Monday through Friday.

If a veteran's debt was referred to the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury), the debt is suspended through September 30, 2021. For questions on debts referred to Treasury, contact the Treasury Cross-Servicing Program (888-826-3127) or the Treasury Offset Program (800-304-3107).

The VA is here to help veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Please follow national and local guidelines to stay healthy and safe.

# VA ANNOUNCES NEW STRATEGIC REVIEW OF ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD MODERNIZATION PROGRAM

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the strategic review of the electronic health record (EHR) modernization program after Secretary Denis McDonough's initial assessment of the program within his first month in office.

The strategic review consists of a full assessment of the ongoing electronic health record modernization program to ensure continued success for all future EHR deployments. This assessment period will not exceed 12 weeks.

"A successful EHR deployment is essential in the delivery of lifetime, world-class health care for our veterans," said McDonough. "After a rigorous review of our most-recent deployment at Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center, it is apparent that a strategic review is necessary. The VA remains committed to the Cerner Millennium solution, and we must get this right for veterans."

McDonough further explained that VA employees' diligence while executing the EHR deployment in the face of a challenging and unanticipated global pandemic cannot be overlooked.

"Our dedicated VA professionals continue to work feverishly on this effort even as we maneuver through the complexities and surges of the COVID-19 pandemic," said McDonough.

The VA's ongoing analysis of the Mann-Grandstaff Initial Operating Capability (IOC) post-deployment activities have precipitated the need for a schedule shift. While Columbus is currently scheduled to remain the next "go-live" site, the order of subsequent deployments may be revised as a result of this strategic review. The strategic review will focus on identifying areas for additional productivity and clinical workflow optimization at Mann-Grandstaff and upcoming "go-live" sites, conducting further research into veteran-centered improvements for the patient portal experience, data syndication, and revenue cycle improvements.



# VA SUICIDE PREVENTION TOOL PUTS LIFESAVING INFORMATION IN R.E.A.C.H.

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released a mobile app, March 18, that offers step-by-step guidance for those who are trying to support someone they care about and for those who are concerned about their own emotional wellbeing.

Developed by the PREVENTS Office, the [How We R.E.A.C.H. Coaching Tool](#) includes five actions to take when REACHing out to someone in need or when you are REACHing out for help for yourself. It provides additional resource information and suggested language to use when starting what are often very difficult conversations.

When we REACH to those in need, we:

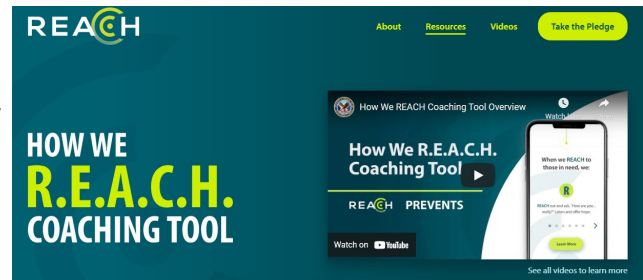
- R – Reach out and ask, “How are you...really?” Listen and offer hope.
- E – Engage them about possible risk factors and changes in their life to better understand their pain.
- A – Attend to their safety. Unless you are concerned about your safety, stay with them.
- C – Connect them to resources such as supportive friends and family, professionals or a crisis line.
- H – Help them make and maintain a plan to stay safe. Encourage them to share it with others.

When we REACH because we are hurting, we:

- R – Reach to a loved one or someone we trust. Don’t be afraid to reach out — now.
- E – Engage those we trust and discuss life changes and risk factors that are contributing to our pain.
- A – Attend to our safety. Contact someone who can be with us and help us stay safe.
- C – Connect with family, friends or appropriate professionals. Contact a crisis line and be honest so they can help.
- H – Help others understand how they can help us stay safe. Share a safety plan if we have one.

“The How We R.E.A.C.H.” Coaching Tool empowers everyone with basic information so they can take the necessary critical steps to provide – or receive – help and hope,” said PREVENTS Executive Director Barbara Van Dahlen, Ph.D. “It puts this important information at our fingertips, on our phones, giving people the confidence to reach out for themselves, to friends and loved ones, to ensure they get the support they deserve.”

The tool is a key component of REACH, the first ever national public health campaign focused on suicide prevention. Established in July 2020, [REACH](#) aims to engage everyone with the goal of changing the culture of mental health and preventing suicide among Veterans and all Americans. It was developed with the help of military and veterans service organizations, and in collaboration with other organizations that have pledged to assist with the dissemination of this potentially life-saving app.



# VA MODERNIZING GI® BILL PLATFORM

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awarded a contract, in mid-March, to transform the operations of the GI Bill® to a digital platform, in hopes of improving education benefits and customer service delivery to nearly one million students served each year.

Referred to as the Digital GI Bill®, the VA is hopeful this platform will enable the VA to call, email, text, and chat with GI Bill® beneficiaries, grant the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) immediate access to beneficiary records and respond to questions from colleges and universities instantaneously.

“We are in the beginning stage of implementing a multi-year, joint undertaking with select vendors working together to deliver a modern, integrated solution for our GI Bill® students,” said Acting VA Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. “Throughout implementation, the VA will seek feedback from students, schools, and partners to ensure we are meeting their needs effectively as they pursue their academic and vocational goals.”

The Digital GI Bill® developed by Veterans Benefits Administration and VA’s Office of Information and Technology (OIT) features:

- Improved customer and financial services, allowing for timely and accurate delivery of payments and real-time eligibility and benefit information.
- The ability for GI Bill® students to engage with the VA through electronic outreach, intake, and upgraded communication tools for on-the-spot service.
- An end-to-end systems management perspective to ensure proper compliance and oversight of GI Bill® programs, and the use of data and business intelligence tools to track, monitor, and measure school and student outcomes.
- Support for new program and policy requirements to keep up with the ever-evolving changes within the academic community and job market.



The VA is using \$243 million received under the CARES Act to support the Digital GI Bill® modernization overhaul.



# SFVAHCS COVID-19 VACCINE UPDATE

The Sioux Falls VA Health Care System is at the forefront of administering COVID-19 vaccines. As of March 19, 2021 – the Sioux Falls VA has provided over 14,000 vaccinations.

The Sioux Falls VA is now offering vaccines to all enrolled Veterans who receive care within the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System. Enrolled veterans can now call 605-333-5310 to schedule their vaccination at one of their upcoming vaccine clinics.

**Walk in Clinic (no appointment necessary)**

Royal C. Johnson Veterans Memorial Hospital—2501 W 22nd Street—Sioux Falls—March 26—8 am—3 pm  
Marshall, MN—500 Timmerman Dr—Marshall—March 31—first dose clinic—8 am—2 pm and April 28 second dose clinic—8 am—2 pm

**Scheduled Appointments (call to make an appointment)**

Mitchell—1308 W. 15th Ave—March 24—first dose clinic and April 21—second dose clinic

Brookings—American Legion Hall—1229 Western Ave—March 25—first dose clinic and April 22 second dose clinic

Spirit Lake Community Based Outpatient Clinic—1850 Royal Avenue—March 26

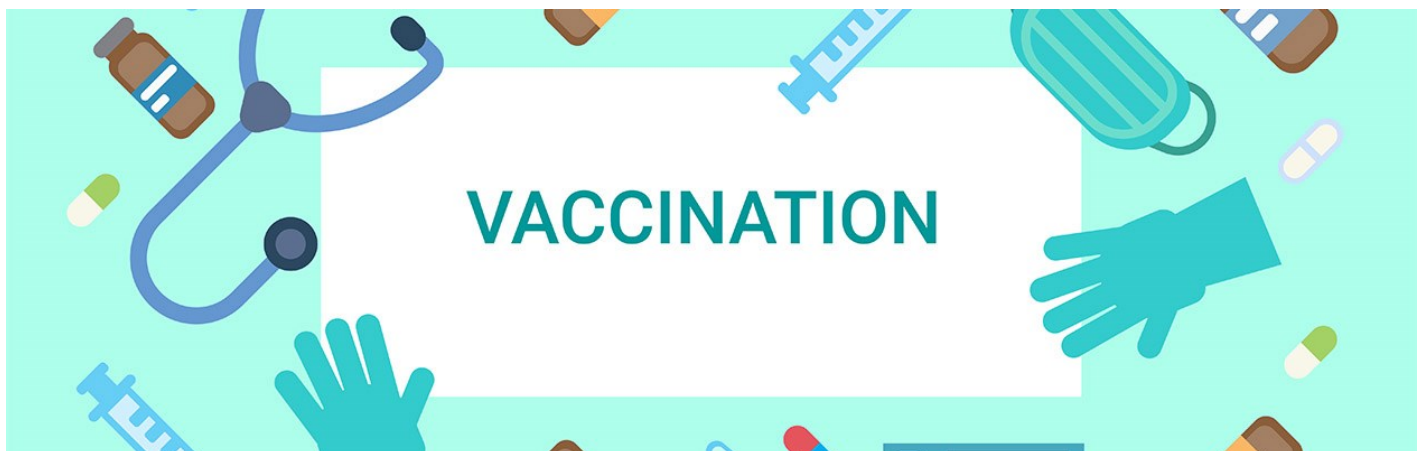
Aberdeen Community Based Outpatient Clinic—3307 10th Avenue Southeast—April 8

Dakota Dunes Community Based Outpatient Clinic—380 West Anchor—April 9

Royal C. Johnson Veterans Memorial Hospital—2501 W 22nd Street—Sioux Falls—Vaccination Dates: April 1, 2, 8, 9, 15, 16, 22 and 23.

If you are a veteran that is interested in receiving care at the VA but are not yet enrolled, please apply for VA health care online or call the Eligibility office at 605-373-4196 to apply. To receive a vaccine at the Sioux Falls VA you must be a veteran enrolled and eligible for VA health care benefits.

For more information contact Erin Bultje at 605-333-6889 or [erin.bultje@va.gov](mailto:erin.bultje@va.gov).



# NEXT GENERATION UNIFORM SERVICES ID CARD

The Department of Defense is transitioning from its current paper-based Uniformed Services Identification (USID) card to a more secure, next generation USID card.

The Next Generation USID card incorporates an updated design and security features to deter counterfeiting and fraud, and is printed on a plastic card-stock. Initial issuance of the Next Generation USID card began on July 31, 2020, at select DoD ID card facilities, with phased implementation at all DoD ID card facilities.

USID cards are issued to retired and reserve members, dependent family members of Uniformed Services members, and other eligible individuals in accordance with DoD policy to facilitate access to benefits, privileges, and DoD bases. The Next Generation USID card does not change the populations who are eligible to receive the current card.

Currently-issued USID cards remain valid through their expiration date. In an effort to limit the impact on ID card issuance facilities, cards will not be reissued solely for the purpose of obtaining the Next Generation USID card. Individuals with an indefinite (INDEF) expiration date on their current USID card should wait until summer 2021 to have their Next Generation USID card issued.

For more information visit:

<https://www.cac.mil/Next-Generation-Uniformed-Services-ID-Card/>

Click here to search ID card office locations and to schedule appointments: <https://idco.dmdc.osd.mil/idco/locator>.

Frequently asked questions and answers can be found on the next page.

## Next Generation USID Card Type



Armed Forces of the United States

Geneva Conventions Identification Card



U.S. Department of Defense / Uniformed Services

Sponsor Identification and Privilege Card

# NEXT GEN USID FAQ

What is changing on the USID card, and why?

The Next Gen USID card transitions the current USID card to plastic cardstock with enhanced security features and updated topology. The Next Gen USID card does not change the populations who are eligible to receive the current USID card.

When can I get the Next Gen USID card?

Beginning July 31, 2020, individuals with expiring ID cards will begin to receive the Next Gen USID card at ID card issuance facilities as they are equipped with the equipment and supplies necessary to issue the Next Gen USID card. In an effort to conserve resources and limit the impact on ID card issuance facilities, cards will not be reissued solely for the purpose of obtaining the Next Gen USID card.

What should I do if I have a USID card with an indefinite expiration date?

Individuals with an indefinite expiration date on their current USID card should wait until summer 2021 to have their Next Gen USID card issued.

Who will be affected by the USID card change?

All DoD USID cardholders, benefit providers, other U.S. government agencies, and vendors and businesses that use the USID card for identity verification and/or benefits eligibility.

Where can I get the Next Gen USID card?

Contact your nearest ID card issuance facility, or use the Site Locator and Appointment Scheduler on ID Card Office Online at, <https://idco.dmdc.osd.mil/idco/>, to find a location near you. There are over 1,500 ID card issuance facilities with over 2,250 workstations worldwide that issue DoD ID cards.

What do I need to bring with me?

Two forms of ID from the "List of Acceptable Identity Documents for DoD ID Card Issuance" available at, [https://www.cac.mil/Portals/53/Documents/List\\_of\\_Acceptable\\_Documents.pdf](https://www.cac.mil/Portals/53/Documents/List_of_Acceptable_Documents.pdf). One must be an unexpired, federal-or state-issued photo ID. Please review the "Pre-Arrival Checklist" available at, [https://www.cac.mil/Portals/53/Documents/required\\_docs.pdf](https://www.cac.mil/Portals/53/Documents/required_docs.pdf), which contains all of the information needed to obtain or renew a DoD ID card.

Where can I use my Next Gen USID card?

The Next Gen USID card can be used at all locations where current USID cards are accepted.

Will my current USID still be accepted?

Yes, currently-issued USID cards remain valid through their expiration date. Cards will not be reissued solely for the purpose of obtaining the Next Gen USID card.



# **GSA AWARDS LEASE FOR NEW RAPID CITY CBOC**

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) recently awarded a 20-year lease to Dream Design International, Inc. to build a new Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) planned to be accepting patients in early 2023.

GSA will provide the VA with a high quality outpatient clinic built to address the specific needs and requirements for the more than 7,000 veterans that live in the area. The approximately 49,000 sq ft of space facility will include a wide range of capabilities such as primary care, mental health, specialty care, women's health, pharmacy care, audiology, laboratory services, and physical therapy.

"We are excited to work with the VA to accommodate the growing health care needs for the veterans living in and around Rapid City," said acting Regional Administrator Penny Grout for GSA's Rocky Mountain Region. "This project will deliver the right workspace for our VA partners to provide high quality services to the area."

"This announcement marks a significant milestone in this exciting project," said Sandra Horsman, Director of the VA Black Hills Health Care System. "The new clinic will double the space of our current location, giving veterans and staff a spacious, efficient, and healing environment for care."

This new facility will be located at 6565 Mount Rushmore Road in a convenient and accessible location. The new CBOC will also have more than 300 on-site parking spaces to accommodate patients.

GSA provides centralized procurement for the federal government, managing a real estate portfolio of more than 370 million rentable square feet nationwide and overseeing approximately \$68 billion in annual contracts.

# SAVE LIVES ACT

President Joe Biden signed the [SAVE LIVES Act](#) into law March 24, expanding the VA's legal authority to provide COVID-19 vaccines to all veterans, regardless of their VA health care enrollment status, as well as veteran spouses, caregivers, and some beneficiaries.

The SAVE LIVES Act removed some of the legal limits on the medical care VA can provide to veterans, based on health care eligibility and priority groups.

The expanded authority depends on readily available COVID-19 vaccine supply and requires the VA to continue to prioritize vaccinations and healthcare delivery for our nation's veterans enrolled in VA care.

"The SAVE LIVES Act increases the number of individuals who are eligible to get lifesaving COVID-19 vaccines from the VA from 9.5 million to more than 33 million," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "Meeting the task of vaccinating this expanded population will be a tremendous undertaking for the VA and will require a significant increase in our allocation of vaccine supply, but I am confident that VA's workforce is up to the task."

The VA is providing COVID-19 vaccinations to veterans and employees per its COVID-19 Vaccination Plan. As of March 24, the VA has fully vaccinated 1,594,812 individuals, including veterans, VA employees, and federal partners.

The next steps in the VA's prioritized expansion efforts are to offer the vaccine to all enrolled veterans – approximately 9.5 million – followed by those outlined in the bill, as vaccine supply permits:

- Non-enrolled veterans as defined in the new legislation, including those without service-connected disabilities and who have incomes above VA's threshold.
- Overseas veterans who rely on the Foreign Medical Program.
- Veteran caregivers who are enrolled in either the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers or the Program of General Caregiver Support Services.
- Veteran caregivers enrolled in certain Geriatrics and Extended Care Programs, such as Veteran Directed Care, Bowel and Bladder, Home Based Primary Care, and VA's Medical Foster Home Program.
- Civilian Health and Medical Programs of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recipients.
- Veteran spouses.

In March and April 2021, the VA will conduct pilots of COVID-19 vaccination for individuals specified in HR1276 at select VA medical centers. These pilots will work through critical steps in the process including communications, operations including space and staffing, systems for registration, enrollment, and scheduling, documentation, and data transmission.

The VA currently receives approximately 200,000 first, or single doses, of COVID-19 vaccine each week. The VA estimates that it will need a minimum of 300,000 first or single doses of COVID-19 vaccine weekly to offer COVID-19 vaccination to an additional three million veterans who are enrolled but not currently using VA health care. The VA estimates that it will need approximately 600,000 first, or single doses, of COVID-19 vaccine each week to further expand vaccination to all individuals outlined in HR1276. First or single dose supply is the best indicator of the VA's capacity to offer expanded COVID-19 vaccination.

Interested veterans, their caregivers, and veteran spouses who qualify under the legislation can click [here](#) to get more information about COVID-19 vaccines at the VA. Updates will be provided regarding the availability of vaccine supply and other resources.

# TEXT 9-1-1 AVAILABLE IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Wireless cell phone customers in South Dakota can text to 9-1-1 when they can't call in an emergency. The text, like a phone call, will be routed to a local 9-1-1 dispatch center.

"Text-to-9-1-1 should only be used in an emergency when you can't call 9-1-1," said Craig Price, cabinet secretary for the South Dakota Department of Public Safety. "The Text-to-9-1-1 option would be good to use if speaking out loud would put the caller in danger or if the caller is deaf, hard-of-hearing or speech impaired."

Text-to-9-1-1 is not yet 100 percent activated in Todd County. People texting 9-1-1 in that county will receive a message stating that text service



When should Text-to-9-1-1 be used?

If you cannot safely make a call (active shooting, domestic violence, home invasion or abduction).

It is also for those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have difficulty speaking.

How do I text 9-1-1?

Enter 911 in the recipient field. Include your location and type of emergency in your message.

Can I text 9-1-1 from any cell phone?

You will need an active text plan in order to text 9-1-1.

Is a voice call the most reliable way to reach 9-1-1?

Yes... CALL if you can, TEXT if you can't. And remember... DO NOT TEXT AND DRIVE!

## Text to 9-1-1 Now available in SD!

For more information, visit [www.Text911SD.com](http://www.Text911SD.com)

is unavailable and they will be directed to make a 9-1-1 call instead.

People who are unable to call 9-1-1, should remember these steps about Text to 9-1-1:

- Don't text and drive.
- In the first text message, send the location and type of emergency.
- Text in simple words; keep the text message short without the use of abbreviations or slang.
- Be prepared to answer questions and follow instructions from the 9-1-1 call taker.
- Voice calls to 9-1-1 are still the best and fastest way to contact 9-1-1.
- Call 9-1-1 if you can, text if you can't.

For more information on the Text to 9-1-1 program in South Dakota, visit [text911sd.com](http://text911sd.com).

The state 9-1-1 Coordination Program is part of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

# GFP COMMISSION PROPOSAL WOULD CREATE HUNTING SEASON FOR DISABLED VETERANS

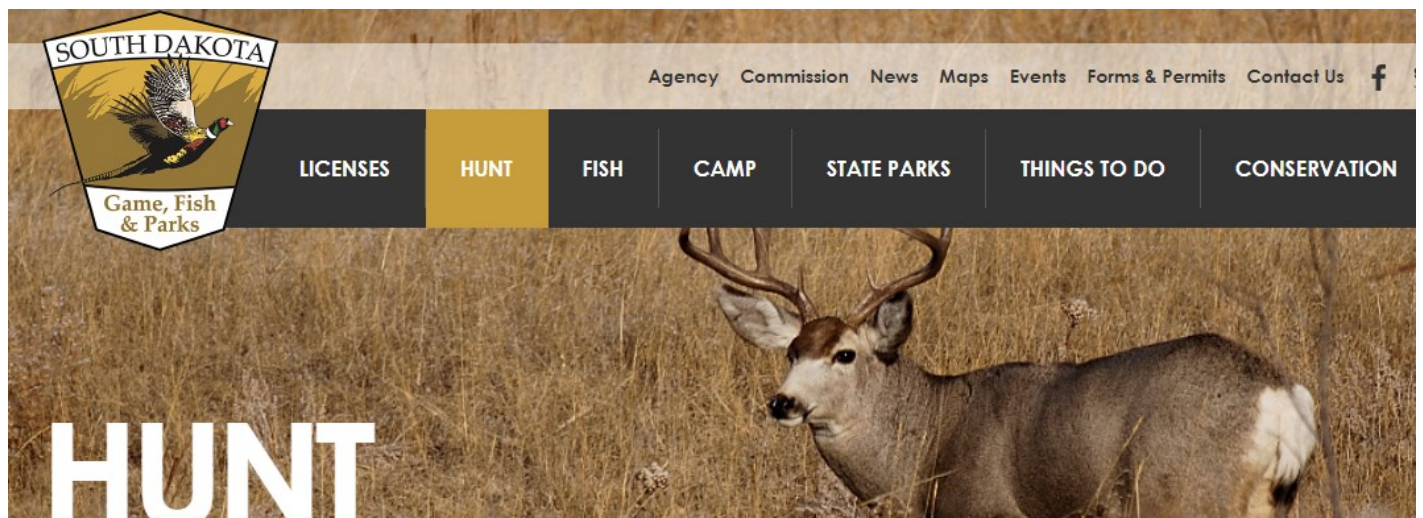
The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission proposed an avenue for nonprofit organizations to apply for deer licenses for disabled veterans and purple heart recipients.

The proposal would allow nonprofit organizations to obtain up to 10 (any deer) licenses that would be valid on private lands only. The proposal would require sponsoring nonprofit organizations to complete and submit an application to Game, Fish, and Parks (GF&P) stating the name, address, and phone number of the sponsoring organization; the requested date of the season; the location of the hunt; and the name of any landowner providing private land access for the hunt.

The proposal would also require the sponsor to provide a report with results of the hunt to GF&P after the event.

Individuals can comment on this proposal by visiting [gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions](http://gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions). Comments can also be mailed to 523 E. Capitol Ave., Pierre, SD 57501.

To see the proposal in its entirety, visit [gfp.sd.gov/commission/information](http://gfp.sd.gov/commission/information) (pages 39-40). To be included in the public record and to be considered by the commission; comments must include a full name and city of residence and meet the submission deadline of 72 hours before the public hearing. The next GFP Commission meeting will be held April 8-9.





# UPCOMING EVENTS

Apr 2-5—State Offices will be closed

Jun 14—Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride—Begins at Military Heritage Alliance—Sioux Falls (1600 W. Russell Street)—Registration 12:30 pm (CT) and ride begins at 2:30 pm (CT)

June 24-27—American Legion State Convention—Huron

Aug 16-18—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Ramkota Hotel—Pierre

Aug 23—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser at Barrel House—Sioux Falls (4701 E. 54th Street)

Oct 23—Midwest Honor Flight Hangar Dance at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance—Sioux Falls (1600 W. Russell Street)



**HONOR RIDE**  
**MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT**

*"RIDING TO KEEP THEM FLYING"*

**Sunday, June 13, 2021 | 2:30 PM**

Registration begins at 12:30 PM at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance. Honor a Veteran you know and ride to raise funds for Midwest Honor Flight. Ride includes a slow salute past the Sioux Falls VA Hospital before an escort to the new South Dakota State Cemetery.

**MORE INFORMATION & PRE-REGISTRATION:**  
**MIDWESTHONORFLIGHT.ORG/RIDE**

Midwest Honor Flight is a 100% volunteer organization. All proceeds from this event go directly towards future Honor Flight and more importantly, our local Veterans.

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